THE ANNUAL PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL
WHAT'S IN IT FOR THE EMPLOYEE?

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Since the mid 1990's the Fresno Fire Department had experienced a large change in personnel due to numerous retirements. In 2004, approximately 70 percent of the employees at the firefighter rank had less than three years of experience. Although firefighters received entry level instruction including evaluation during the first year, an annual performance appraisal program for all employees had only been conceptualized. Such a program was considered a worthwhile project by a task force of fire officers. However, while the supervisors considered the appraisal process to be beneficial to the organization, the need for employee input was recognized.

The problem was the Fresno Fire Department did not have input from its firefighters regarding what was valued in the performance appraisal process. The purpose of this research project was to determine what perceptions Fresno Firefighters had concerning an annual performance appraisal program.

Descriptive research was used to answer the following questions:

1. What barriers exist that may cause an annual employee performance appraisal program to fail in the Fresno Fire Department?

2. What elements should be included in the Fresno Fire Department employee performance appraisal system?

3. How would the implementation of an annual employee performance appraisal program benefit the newly hired "Generation X" employees of the Fresno Fire Department?

Procedures included a literature review using the Learning Resource Center at the National Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The review sought barriers to the

implementation of employee performance appraisal programs along with elements that should be included in such programs. In addition, work attitudes and characteristics were studied to determine how an annual appraisal of performance might benefit the development of this new generation of employees. A survey was administered to the firefighters of the Fresno Fire Department to determine what values they placed in such systems. The survey results were then compared to the information gathered in the literature review.

The results identified potential barriers to the implementation of an appraisal program. These included lack of support from the administration, supervisors, and employees. In addition, employees identified worthwhile components that should be included should a performance appraisal program be implemented. Such components were found to assist in the development of these newly hired firefighters.

The research recommended the establishment of a written policy that outlines the guidelines to be used for an annual performance appraisal for all firefighters in Fresno. The framework for the program should identify the employees as the major stakeholders in the evaluation process. Through the elements identified in this research project, the annual performance appraisal process was viewed as a valuable instrument that can be used to develop firefighting professionals.

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INTRODUCTION

The Fresno Fire Department is one of many fire service agencies that did not conduct annual performance appraisals of its employees. Recruit firefighters were brought into the organization through a competitive testing and background process. Following a 13-week recruit academy, firefighters would complete a probationary period lasting one year. During the probationary period performance evaluations were completed monthly. However, following successful completion of probation, a firefighter's performance was never formally appraised unless the employee did something extraordinarily right or wrong.

A small task force was assembled to develop an annual performance appraisal program. The task force was comprised of three captains, a battalion chief, a deputy chief, and a management analyst. The task force recognized much of the value of initiating an annual performance appraisal program for all members. This would include setting expectations of employees, opening lines of communication, and providing information up and down the chain of command regarding employee performance and the goals and objectives of the organization. However, it was also recognized that such a significant procedural change could cause resistance as a result of employee misconceptions of the performance appraisal process. Employee buy-in was extremely important in order for this process to be successful.

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BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The City of Fresno was incorporated in 1885 and has since become the largest metropolitan city within the San Joaquin Valley of California. Fresno is located approximately midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco. The city consists of a highly diverse population of over 440,000 people within a community considered the economic and cultural center of one of the nation's fastest growing regions.

Established in 1877, the Fresno Fire Department is a full service organization that protects an area of approximately 110 square miles while responding to more than 30,000 emergency incidents each year. Services provided by the department include fire suppression, fire investigation, fire prevention, emergency medical services, and hazardous materials response from 21 fire companies located in 16 strategically located fire stations. The human resources of the department include 263 sworn firefighters including the fire chief, two deputy chiefs, and seven battalion chief officers.

Firefighters of the organization work a 56-hour week under a three platoon system. While firefighters typically are assigned permanent duty assignments, they may be assigned to different station assignments due to special operational needs of the department. Each company is staffed with a minimum of three personnel including a fire captain, one engineer (apparatus operator), and one firefighter. Under this system, captains provide first line supervision that includes the assurance that employees are capable of performing their respective duties.

During the previous five years, the make up of the department had changed significantly. Since 1999, the department had hired 90 new firefighters due to numerous retirements. In January 2004, approximately 70 percent of the firefighters of the Fresno Fire Department had less than three years of experience. The implementation of an annual performance appraisal program was seen as an opportunity for the continued development of a fairly young workforce.

A formal process that included an annual review of every firefighter's performance had only been considered in conceptual form. At the time of this research, formal performance appraisals were completed monthly for probationary employees only. The monthly evaluation instrument used to appraise performance of these new employees was criticized as being highly subjective, generic, and encouraged the rater to provide mid-ranged scores for performance. Once the one-year probationary period was completed, no further evaluation of performance, good or bad, was completed unless unusual incidents occurred.

Under direction of the city manager, the fire chief was charged with the responsibility to initiate an annual performance appraisal program. In turn, the fire chief

assigned a task force of one deputy chief, one battalion chief and three fire captains to implement an annual performance appraisal program that would provide information to the fire department and its employees concerning member performance.

In addition, fire captains were provided introductory training on conducting performance evaluations. This was significant since management received numerous complaints that supervisors were not familiar with the steps required to objectively evaluate performance. As part of this training, fire captains were given an opportunity to provide input into the performance appraisal process for Fresno.

The problem was that while the supervisors and managers of the organization valued the performance appraisal process, they did not seek input from employees as to how such a process could be implemented to provide maximum benefit. The firefighters were viewed as legitimate stake-holders in this process. This was especially true since a significant number of firefighters were new to the organization. Therefore, employee input was seen as an opportunity to develop common vision among all members of the organization. In doing so, the department might very well develop a sense of participation and trust as it implemented this change.

The purpose of this research project was to determine what perceptions Fresno firefighters had concerning the performance appraisal process. This research relates to Unit 12 of the *Executive Leadership* course taught at the National Fire Academy (NFA, 2000). In this module, influencing styles of the executive fire officer were discussed. The use of common vision as well as participation and trust were presented as styles used to influence others. Influence was defined as a strategy used to educate and involve another person about our point of view so that he or she will want what we want.

The information resulting from this research will assist in the establishment of an employee performance appraisal program for the Fresno Fire Department. The result will better ensure that the needs of today's firefighters concerning performance and career goals are met. Perhaps more importantly, key elements will be identified that will enable the Fresno Fire Department to ensure its firefighters are performing at a level that is expected. Such a result is consistent with the United States Fire Administration's five-year operational objectives, one of which is to appropriately respond in a timely manner to emergent issues.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A relevant literature review was conducted for this research project with the objective of answering three questions. First, the author sought potential problems organizations face when implementing a performance appraisal program. Second, the research sought elements of an effective performance appraisal system. Finally, differences in today's workforce were sought that an effective performance appraisal program could address.

Barriers to Performance Appraisal

According to Graham (2004), performance appraisals are critical to a well-run organization. Such a process can improve the morale of employees who meet performance expectations, and provide fair warning to employees whose performance is unsatisfactory and where improvement is needed in order to meet the standards of the organization. However, ill-prepared evaluations are worse than no evaluation at all. Inaccurate evaluations can come back to haunt the organization in the form of discipline

hearings, arbitration, grievance procedures, or civil court proceedings downstream. Thus, commitment from the organization to conduct performance evaluations correctly is essential.

In addition, selection of supervisors is important. Graham suggests selecting managers who are capable of being honest. This is true because many performance evaluations exaggerate employee performance. Graham suggests many supervisors lack the spine to be honest with the person they are rating.

Krug (1998) explained performance evaluations are the best tool for measuring employee performance and guiding employee development and improvement. However, the performance evaluation process can be a frustrating ritual of the modern workplace. The most frequent complaint is that a large number of managers are poorly trained in how to give feedback to employees and they provide little coaching, mentoring, or support. Secondly, evaluation procedures are often poorly designed, making the process cumbersome and difficult to administer. Finally, employees often place the entire burden of the review process on the supervisor, doing little throughout the year to seek feedback on performance, avenues for improvement, or professional development.

According to Stein (1999), most supervisors are uncomfortable about being required to conduct performance appraisals. In some cases, managers mistrust the performance rating scale. In others, the supervisor lacks proper training in completing the performance appraisal. Further, Stein described a resistance to procedural change. In many cases the performance appraisal is very subjective, requiring the supervisor to add his or her personal commentary regarding the employee's performance. Stein feels many

supervisors are uncomfortable or unable to write such documentation. Finally, many performance appraisal instruments are too general and do not apply to the fire service.

Lam and Yik (2002) studied the effects of negative feedback in the evaluation process. They explained formal performance appraisals provide feedback to employees about how the organization views their performance. The single most important information employees receive from the employer are the actual ratings they obtain through the performance appraisal system. Such ratings signify recognition, status, and future prospects within the organization.

Timely and accurate feedback is beneficial to both the organization and the individual. Such feedback is seen to play a significant role in the development of job and organizational attitudes, particularly when it is accepted and comprehended well. However, in one-third of the cases where negative feedback was given to employees, morale was reduced and employee performance decreased.

McManus (2001) argued that if there is no feedback, motivation to do what is expected does not exist. He questioned how employees could be expected to improve, especially in the manner that is expected, if we do not provide enough of the right kind of feedback about performance. Organizations often fail to define expectations clearly, give limited feedback relative to people's performance, and when they do give feedback, it is often of a negative nature that serves little purpose. Negative feedback, especially when it is delivered in an emotional manner, does not foster learning. Rather, negative feedback elicits a fear response that motivates employees to seek survival. McManus recommends defining expectations up front, providing frequent, positive feedback specific to expectations and avoiding the use of emotionally charged negative feedback.

Byornlund (1997) considered six barriers to effective performance evaluation within municipalities. The first was a lack of logistical and technical support. Such support includes in-depth job and task analysis, ongoing training for supervisors, and updates to the program to accommodate changes in organizational goals. Next was union opposition. According to Byornlund, unions traditionally have emphasized seniority as the preferred basis for making decisions about salary and promotions. In addition, unions sometimes distrust management's ability or motivation to make unbiased performance ratings. Third, a lack of upper-level support sometimes exists. Support from the city manager and elected officials are key factors to the success of the performance appraisal system. Byornlund found raters were often more concerned with how their superiors viewed ratings than how the ratings affected employees.

Managerial opposition was a fourth barrier. The reasons for managerial opposition included the following:

- A normal dislike of criticizing a subordinate.
- Lack of skill needed to handle the interviews.
- Dislike of a new procedure and the resulting operations.
- Mistrust of the validity of the appraisal instrument.
- Forms and processes are cumbersome and time-consuming.

Employee opposition was next. Byornlund explained employees often assume a defensive position when deficiencies are pointed out. This is especially true if pay, recognition, or rewards are at stake. In addition, employees will resist a system that is perceived to appraise or reward unfairly.

Finally, conflicts on the purposes and goals of performance appraisals often exist when implemented. Byornlund cautioned organizations that try to achieve all ends with a single evaluation device. The performance appraisal process must be part of a

performance management system that emphasizes ongoing communication and coaching in order to be a valid supervisory process.

In summary, significant barriers to the implementation of an employee performance appraisal program were recognized. While such programs may actually improve morale of employees, ill-prepared evaluations can adversely impact the organization. Commitment from the organization to conduct performance appraisals correctly is essential. This includes logistical and technical support, in-depth job analysis, and on-going training.

Next, management may not support the process. This may be due to management's lack of skills to accurately evaluate, document, and communicate performance. Additionally, managers often fail to provide timely and accurate expectations and feedback to employees regarding performance. When feedback is provided, negative feedback is often communicated incorrectly thereby reducing morale and further reducing performance.

Finally, employee groups, including unions, often oppose the implementation of performance appraisal programs. This is due to a variety of factors including distrust of management's ability, a perception that the appraisal process is unfair, and a traditional emphasis on seniority rules.

Elements of the Performance Appraisal

According to the Goodson and Sneed (1998), company officers are routinely required to submit performance evaluation reports. These reports serve three purposes: to inform the employee and administration of how well the employee is performing his duties, to form a work improvement plan if the member's performance is below standard,

and to document the member's work history in case disciplinary action is required. The performance evaluation measures an employee's performance against industry standards for performance. A supervisor observes the employee in a variety of work-related tasks and then evaluates the employee based on their performance and behavior. A formal review provides feedback to the employee on quantity and quality of work performed. This feedback can be positive, negative or neutral depending on the results of the evaluation. The review also provides an opportunity to establish work-related goals toward which the employee can strive in the coming year.

A work improvement plan may be used when a member's performance is below standard. This is a form of contract between the employee and the supervisor that identifies specific performance to be improved. Identified in the plan are specific training the department will provide as well as monitoring procedures and periodic testing that will be used to evaluate the member's progress.

According to Graham (2004) the fire service must develop a policy on how the performance appraisal process is to be accomplished. Such a policy must be organization specific. Well prepared job descriptions, performance goals, and expectations are an essential precursor to the evaluation process. Observations by supervisors on performance must be properly documented throughout the rating period. Such observations must be highly objective. The policy should include direction on how to gather necessary information from the employee and other sources, how to prepare the document, and how to finalize the document. Finally, management should review the prepared document before the document is reviewed and signed by the rated employee. The review should include auditing the evaluation for accuracy, meeting with the rated

employee, discussing performance, looking for potential problem areas, and verifying level of knowledge.

The appraisal process must be explained in the employee guide so employees know how their performance will be evaluated. Keeping the process secret will only cause future problems including less than optimum performance and low morale. When employees know each step of the process, they are better motivated to meet the standards that must be met.

Graham encourages the use of specific facts to support ratings high and low. Such facts are drawn from personal observations, the observations of other supervisors, and other documented events generated during the evaluation period. Accuracy is essential, particularly if the evaluation has negative elements that may impact future employment or promotion. Graham cautions supervisors on effects that may cloud a supervisor's thinking. These include the halo effect, the harsh and lenient effects, the central tendency effect, the similar to me effect, the first or last impression effect, and the stereotype effect. Each of these effects can cloud the judgment of the evaluator. Training supervisors on the proper methods used in evaluating employees is essential.

Stein (1999) presented the process that should be followed when conducting performance appraisals. The first step is for the team member and supervisor to have a meeting at the beginning of the evaluation period. Expectations are discussed along with factors regarding the work performance as related to the team member's job description. Additionally, personal and organizational goals are discussed that the team member is committed to achieve. Objectives are identified and prioritized by the supervisor. Finally, a plan for the achievement of those objectives is developed.

The need to maintain notes on performance in a supervisor's log was stressed. Such a log would provide specific facts to include in the performance appraisal. Notes should include behaviors that should be continued and those that need to be changed. However, praise for good work is not a once a year event. Positive and negative behaviors should be addressed immediately in order to maintain appropriate communication.

The appraisal interview session should be as non-threatening as possible. Appraisal sessions should be held in private with plenty of time to work through the whole session. The room should be configured in a comfortable manner in order to reduce the apprehensions of the employee. If done properly, the team member will be open to the session and the supervisor will project an upbeat, sincere attitude toward the process.

There should be no surprises. Everything to be discussed should have already been mentioned to the team member and logged in the supervisor's log. Hence, performance appraisal is a continual process.

Disagreements are prevented through proper documentation, communicating continually, and considering the performance appraisal a continual process. Stein encourages supervisors to focus on performance, actual situations encountered, and achievable goals. The appraisal must be based on actual performance, not personality.

Finally, Stein discussed the advantages supervisors gain from constructive criticism from subordinates. Supervisors should regularly analyze their actions, behavior, and leadership style. True critical analysis reveals how a supervisor rates from a team perspective. While self-criticism is difficult, asking a team member to rate the supervisor

can lead to areas for needed improvement, enhanced communication, and reduction in misperceptions.

The need for continual feedback was a common theme of the literature reviewed. Wiant (1999) explained employees often find themselves in situations where they must change direction frequently. Therefore, employees seek constant feedback to determine whether the direction they are working is what is expected by the organization. Wiant further explained that the performance evaluation process for current employees must be frequent, accurate, specific, and timely.

In order to get a clear picture of performance, multiple information sources including peers and staff may be considered. Stubblebine (2001) studied the perceptions of peer evaluation versus supervisor evaluation. According to Stubblebine, it is becoming increasingly popular for organizations to ask employees to evaluate the performance of their own coworkers. This is especially true with the increased focus on the use of teams in the workplace.

While there is general agreement that peer evaluation provides a more complete picture of employee performance, the acceptance of peer evaluation by coworkers is generally low. Stubblebine suggests peer evaluation may be guided by social comparison processes whereas, because of the obviously different supervisor-subordinate relationship, supervisor evaluations would likely not follow a social comparison process.

Fandray (2001) suggests many companies are scrapping the traditional performance evaluation process in favor of total performance management. He suggests a new approach that focuses on coaching and feedback. In such a system the manager and the employee agree upon goals. Goals should be flexible to reflect changing

conditions in the economy and workplace. Employees should think of their managers as coaches who are there to help them achieve success.

In one case study, the 500-person Madison, Wisconsin Police Department stopped doing traditional appraisals for all but probationary officers. The traditional performance evaluation was replaced with a system of individual goal-setting, leadership training, and employee involvement that extends to officers choosing which sergeants they want to work with, sergeants choosing lieutenants and so on. A Department of Justice study of 12 metropolitan police departments found Madison police to be the highest in satisfaction level among its citizens. Fandray suggests using the following guidelines in order to maintain meaningful performance management:

- Link the performance management calendar to the business calendar. Inform employees what needs to be delivered during the year and include the roles each employee must play.
- Conduct a mid-year review. With mid-year results in hand, management can recast plans to meet current conditions.
- Articulate role-based competencies. First everyone must know the five or six qualities that define success for every member of the organization. Then let every employee know how these qualities translate into performance in specific jobs.
- Set developmental guidelines for employees. Make sure employees understand the kinds of developmental opportunities they will have available to them.
- Do not get bogged down in paperwork. Paperwork must facilitate the process of face to face discussion. The paper is not the end result.
- Focus on leadership. Leaders set expectations and coach. Align the organization's needs with those of the employee.

To summarize, the literature review identified multiple components of successful employee performance appraisal programs. Standards of performance must be used to measure employee performance. In addition, performance goals and expectations must be a precursor to the evaluation process. To measure objectively, managers should document facts concerning employee performance throughout the evaluation period. This is done through the use of a supervisor's log. Communication through continual

feedback is essential to a successful performance appraisal program. Goals should be established through the use of a performance plan. Finally, multiple evaluators are often used to gain a clearer picture of performance.

Performance of Generation X Employees

According to Audibert and Jones (2002), Generation X employees are commonly defined as people born between 1964 and 1983. This labeling of generations is not new to society. Past generations included "Boomers," born between 1930 and 1946 and "Baby Boomers," born between 1946 and 1963. Generation Y sometimes referred to as the "Dot Com" generation has since been added. These individuals were born after 1984.

Audibert and Jones studied the factors that impacted the development of Generation X employees. Because both parents often worked outside the home, they represent the first latch key kids in the workforce. Many watched as their hardworking, loyal-to-the-company parents were laid off. Depression and war did not touch their lives, and they grew up with the highest technology our society has ever known. For these reasons, they have been characterized as the most affluent generation to date.

These factors impacted their work attitudes. For example, since they saw company loyalty backfire on their parents, they are not as willing to make the same sacrifices such as long hours for the company. In addition, they do not expect to stay with any one company for an entire career. The fast-paced technological world they grew up in allows them to adapt to change more readily. They want work to be more than about money. They want a place to learn and have fun as well.

Audibert and Jones recognized the need for Generation X employees to develop basic skills. Even so, they described the Generation X profile as one of self-reliance, positive-thinking, flexibility, and an inner belief that it is up to them to succeed.

Maynard (1996) studied the tendencies of members of Generation X and noted a workforce that is less driven than previous generations. Generation X workers consider work as only a piece of their lives. On the other hand, such workers enjoy being in charge of their own destiny and seek ways to develop themselves. Maynard provided the following suggestions in managing members of this generation:

- Focus on results, not processes.
- Set clear deadlines for tangible results.
- Treat employee's questions as opportunities to teach.
- Give them freedom to manage their own time and work; avoid micromanaging.
- Provide opportunities to interact with others; they work well in teams.
- Expect employees to thrive in corporate cultures that value the individual.
- Support their quest to improve skills. They see their resume, not the system, as their ticket to job security.
- Provide constant feedback that is specific and accurate.

According to Caudron (1997), workers age 20 to 33, are forcing companies to rethink and reengineer their training programs. Caudron explained members of this generation tend to be independent problem-solvers, who are remarkably good at getting a job done on their own. They are also well adapted to the computer age. However, they want to know why they must learn something before they will take the time to learn how. Therefore, training as well as feedback on performance must be a continual process.

Minerd (1999) discussed several misconceptions regarding behaviors exhibited by this generation. One misconception is the unwillingness to pay dues. According to Minerd, Generation X are not necessarily unwilling to pay dues, rather, corporate downsizing has shown that dues paying does not pay off. The only source of security

they believe in is their ability to work, solve problems, and add value to a company.

Such abilities can be taken from place to place.

Minerd suggests helping members of Generation X see the daily tangible results of

their work. This may be accomplished through the use of a daily checklist that allows

members to see what they've accomplished. In addition, frequent feedback is needed.

The traditional 12-month formal reviews are not enough to satisfy Generation X.

Managers should provide mentoring while allowing the team member time to

independently accomplish each task. Members of this generation welcome the

opportunity to develop long-term bonds with teachers and mentors. Managers are also

encouraged to develop marketable skills of new workers. Creative challenges and

opportunities to prove their value should be given. Such opportunities create a sense of

security from within for members of Generation X.

On evaluating performance, Adams (2000) argues managers must provide clear

measurable goals against which progress can be measured and appropriately rewarded.

Safety professionals must strive to assist this generation in acquiring skills and expertise

through creative responsibilities and projects. Constant feedback is also essential in

maintaining open lines of communication. Members of Generation X tend to have a low

sense of loyalty to the corporation. Therefore, spending time with members of Generation

X to confirm that what they are doing now will make them more marketable is important.

Martin (2000) reported lower levels of mechanical aptitude, less exposure to

machines and tools, less familiarity with buildings and construction, and basically less

knowledge on how things work among new firefighters. In addition, new employees

were uncomfortable with, or inexperienced in manual labor. Each of these areas has

traditionally been considered to be of high value in the fire service. Martin further found new employees to need more attention and more frequent feedback than generations past.

Martin suggested an emphasis on skills training that enables new employees to succeed. This includes describing what parameters define quality service. Such parameters become the standards of the organization. The use of performance appraisals is important to assure employees are meeting the standards set forth. Martin contends members of Generation X are familiar with such written contracts from schools and parents and react well to them.

Standards of the organization must be a published fabric of the fire department. The use of standards assists the supervisor in establishing benchmarks or expectations for the employee to achieve. The use of standards must be part of the performance appraisal process. When employees don't know what is required of them, morale declines.

By adapting to the latch key environment as children, the Generation X group tends to be very independent. Martin encourages supervisors to provide assignments, stand back, and be ready to answer questions. In other words, be prepared to provide support and assistance in the form of coaching and feedback, perhaps more than what was done previously.

During the 1990's, a number of studies identified a "Skill gap" among new hires in the workforce (Smith, 2000). Specifically, employers felt new hires did not possess acceptable levels of the traditional skills such as math and language, or non-technical social skills such as responsibility, integrity, sociability, and self-management. According to Smith organizations must make a renewed commitment to human resource development to get the most from new employees.

Smith described organizational socialization as a process by which an employee acquires the appropriate knowledge and skills to perform an organizational role. This is accomplished in three steps. The first involves the organization establishing role clarity to the employee, setting expectations, and rewarding or punishing behaviors. The second involves a commitment to organizational norms, the establishment of interpersonal relationships, and feelings of importance to the organization. Smith encourages managers to allow employees autonomy in decision-making. While Generation X employees may never possess a high degree of loyalty to one organization, they will likely be motivated by opportunities to develop different skills and take on new challenges. The final phase involves mutual acceptance and an internalization of organizational values. Smith explains that in order to foster any long-term commitment to the organization, Generation X employees must understand where they fit into the career ladder of the organization.

In summary, an investigation of the performance of modern day workers was done through the literature review. The review noted several characteristics of workers who represent "Generation X." As of this writing, these individuals represent workers in the age group of 21 to 39 years of age. Members of Generation X tend to be self-reliant, positive thinking, flexible, and independent. However, these workers have also been characterized as a workforce that is less driven, lacking in basic skills, and less loyal to the company. Needs of Generation X workers were identified. They included continual feedback, marketable skills development, mentoring, the use of performance contracts, and an understanding of where the employee fits into the organization.

PROCEDURES

Definition of Terms

<u>Baby Boomers.</u>   A generation of people who were
born between 1946 and 1963.

<u>Employee Performance Appraisal.</u>   A form of evaluation that measures
an employee's work performance against what is expected by the employer.

<u>Feedback and Coaching.</u>   Forms of communication from a
supervisor to a subordinate that provide praise, constructive criticism, and suggestions for
improvement.

<u>Fire Captain.</u>   The first line supervisor who
supervises and coordinates the activities of a fire company.

<u>Fire Company.</u>   A firefighting team or crew assigned
to a fire apparatus which consists of a fire captain, fire engineer, and a firefighter.

<u>Firefighter.</u>   The first line level employee who
performs a full range of firefighting duties to protect life and property including response
to emergency calls with a fire company, participation in fire prevention and training
activities, and performance of maintenance of equipment.

<u>Generation X.</u>   A generation of people who were
born between 1964 and 1983.

<u>Generation Y.</u>   A generation of people who were
born after 1984.

<u>Performance Goals.</u>   Goals that are expected to be
accomplished by the employee that are unique to the employee's strengths, weaknesses,
career goals, and development needs.

Performance Plan.   A plan for development that lists the

goals or actions to be accomplished that are intended to help the employee build the

knowledge, skills, and abilities needed to further his or her career.

Performance Standards.   Written guidelines that tell the

employee what is expected while performing tasks within a specific job classification.

Research Methodology

The research procedures used in preparing this project included literature review,

study of performance appraisal programs, and a survey of firefighters of the Fresno Fire

Department.   The literature review began at the Learning Resource Center at the

National Training Center in Emmitsburg, Maryland in December 2003. Further research

was conducted at the Fresno City College Library in Fresno, California, the Fresno Fire

Department Training Division office, and the author's personal collection of books and

articles. In addition, a search was conducted of the World Wide Web in January 2004.

The review focused on three topics: why performance appraisal programs fail, elements

of successful performance appraisal programs, and performance of the Generation X

workforce.

The literature review sought information concerning employee response to

performance appraisal programs. This information was then used to develop questions

for a survey of firefighters of the city of Fresno. The results of the survey were

considered valuable to a work group tasked with the objective of developing an annual

performance appraisal program for the Fresno Fire Department.

The survey of all 85 active Fresno firefighters was conducted in April 2004. The survey asked individual members to identify possible benefits and barriers to the implementation of a performance appraisal program. The survey also asked what components of an employee performance appraisal program would be considered beneficial if included in a performance appraisal program for Fresno. Of the 85 surveys distributed, 73 were completed and returned. A sample of the survey instrument used is included in Appendix A.

The employee survey was developed and administered by the author. Question number one divided the respondents into one of three groups, "Baby-Boomers," "Generation X," or "Generation Y." This enabled the author to determine whether differences existed across these generations. Members of Generation X were of particular interest as these members represented the immediate future of the organization and appeared to have the most at stake with regard to career stability and opportunity.

Respondents were then asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding an employee performance appraisal program. Questions two through nine referred to potential barriers that might cause an employee performance appraisal program to fail in Fresno. Questions ten through 17 asked respondents to identify elements that should be included in the appraisal system. Finally, questions 17 through 21 were developed to determine whether processes within an employee performance appraisal program would be perceived as beneficial to members of the Generation X workforce in Fresno.

Surveys were distributed and returned via the Fresno Fire Department intra-office mail system. Respondents were asked to complete the survey with complete honesty in

order to gain truthful insight to the perceptions of employees regarding performance appraisals. Data from the surveys was entered in a database system for graphical analysis. Once done, the data was analyzed to determine what processes of a performance appraisal program were valued.

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions. It was assumed only knowledgeable individuals experienced in the subject of employee performance appraisal were the authors of the written materials that were used in this research. It was also assumed these authors were honest and unbiased in their research and opinions.

An assumption was also made regarding the respondents of the survey instrument. Namely, that all questions were answered honestly by persons with sufficient knowledge about the subject area and that their responses concerning employee performance appraisals were based on their true feelings.

Limitations. A limited number of references were reviewed during this research. Only references from the National Training Center's learning resource center, Fresno City College, the Fresno Fire Department, the World Wide Web and the author's personal library were used. Hence, the references sought were not necessarily representative of all experts of the areas covered in this research.

The responses to the survey instrument were limited to the views of firefighters of the Fresno Fire Department. Of the 85 firefighters employed, only 73 completed the survey. It is assumed the opinions of those who responded are representative of all firefighters of the Fresno Fire Department. Accordingly, the individuals surveyed did not include members of other job classifications within the department, and it is assumed that the responses of only members at the rank of firefighter would provide the best

information available regarding the value firefighters of the Generation X population place on employee performance appraisal programs.

RESULTS

The results of the research project were achieved through analysis and interpretation of a survey that was distributed to Fresno Firefighters regarding their perceptions of an employee performance appraisal program. A total of 73 firefighters responded to the survey. The results and answers to the research questions are as follows:

Research Question 1. What barriers exist that may cause an annual employee performance appraisal program to fail in the Fresno Fire Department?

The literature review identified potential barriers to the success of an employee performance appraisal system. Such barriers ranged from a lack of support from employees, supervisors, and labor unions to the very administration that implements such a program. Questions two through nine of the firefighter survey dealt with these potential barriers to a performance appraisal program (Specific data regarding how Fresno Firefighters perceived potential barriers to an employee performance appraisal program may be found in Appendix B, Figures 2 through 9).

While the lack of employee support for such a system was identified as a potential barrier in the literature reviewed, this was not the case in the Fresno Firefighter survey. Question two asked whether employees would support an annual appraisal of work performance within the fire department. According to the 73 Fresno Firefighters who responded to the survey, over half indicated they would support this process. Twenty

indicated they may support this process, while twelve indicated they would not support an annual performance appraisal program (Please see Appendix B, Figure 2).

The performance appraisal instrument itself was identified as a potential barrier to the success of an employee appraisal system. A task force within the fire department perceived the existing instrument used for the evaluation of probationary employees as too general and did not apply to the fire service. Question three asked whether this standard city of Fresno evaluation form should be used to evaluate Fresno Firefighters annually. The results were mixed with the majority of those who responded indicating this standard form should not be used for the Fresno Fire Department program (Please see Appendix B, Figure 3).

The literature review indicated supervisors as potential barriers to an employee appraisal program. The firefighter survey provided responses that may support the findings of the literature review. Survey questions four through six asked firefighters how they perceived the support and ability captains within the department would have regarding the execution of an annual employee appraisal program. Mixed results were obtained regarding the support captains would likely have toward this system. The majority of respondents indicated they somewhat agreed captains in Fresno would support a performance appraisal program (Please see Appendix B, Figure 4).

Regarding the ability of Fresno Captains to carry out the evaluation and feedback of firefighters, respondents fairly consistently indicated the captains were capable of documenting performance and providing the feedback and coaching needed. The firefighters indicated Fresno Captains have stronger skills in the areas of providing

feedback and coaching as opposed to documenting and evaluating performance (Please see Appendix B, Figures 5 and 6).

The negative feedback often provided through employee performance appraisal systems was viewed as a potential morale breaker in the literature review. This philosophy was not supported in the Fresno Firefighter survey. Question seven of the firefighter survey asked if negative feedback of performance would reduce the individual's morale on the job. The majority of respondents indicated they did not perceive such communication to reduce morale. Less than a quarter of those who responded indicated negative feedback of performance would reduce their morale (Please see Appendix B, Figure 7).

Lack of support including training from upper management was seen as a potential barrier to the success of an employee appraisal system in the literature review. The results of the firefighter survey appear to support this logic. When asked if the administration of the department would provide adequate support and training for an employee evaluation program in Fresno, the results were mixed. Thirty-four respondents indicated they agreed, while 36 indicated they somewhat agreed or disagreed (Please see Appendix B, Figure 8).

Labor unions were identified as barriers to employee performance appraisal systems in the literature review. The firefighter survey confirmed this opinion. When asked if the Fresno Firefighters Union would support an annual performance appraisal program, the results were quite clear. Only twenty percent of the respondents agreed the union would support such a program (Please see Appendix B, Figure 9).

Research Question 2.   What elements should be included in the Fresno Fire Department employee performance appraisal system?

The literature review identified components that were recommended for the successful execution of an employee performance appraisal program. Performance standards, goals, and expectations should be identified. This would include a definition of the qualities that define success for the employee. Evaluation must be as objective as possible and must cover the entire rating period. To assist in this endeavor, supervisors are encouraged to maintain a supervisor's log. The practice of using input from other supervisors as well as non-supervisory employees was discussed as a way to provide a clearer picture of actual performance. Feedback was a continual theme of the literature review in terms of the employee receiving constant feedback from the supervisor, and the employee providing 360 degree feedback to supervisor. Questions ten through 17 of the Fresno Firefighter survey asked whether these components were regarded as valuable elements of an employee performance appraisal system (Specific data regarding how Fresno Firefighters valued various components of an employee performance appraisal system may be found in Appendix B, Figures 10 through 17).

The literature review recommended the use of job descriptions and performance standards for each position evaluated. The results of the firefighter survey clearly supported this recommendation. Over sixty percent of the respondents indicated performance standards should be identified. Few disagreed, while no respondents strongly disagreed (Please see Appendix B, Figure 10).

To further support this concept, firefighters were asked if the program should identify the quality of performance expected by identifying behaviors considered

standard, above standard, and below standard. Such a process was seen as a means to reduce subjectivity. Again, the firefighters supported this concept. Over 65 percent of the respondents indicated they agreed or strongly agreed that behaviors should be identified that indicate the quality of performance (Please see Appendix B, Figure 11).

Substantial argument exists that indicates supervisors fail to evaluate performance over the entire duration of the evaluation period according to the literature review. The reason for this is supervisors often fail to document facts concerning performance throughout the evaluation period. To provide for a more objective form of evaluation, the literature review recommended the use of a supervisor's log. However, the firefighter survey did not completely support the use of supervisors' notes in an employee performance appraisal program. While the majority of respondents agreed with this concept, almost the same number of respondents only partially agreed or did not agree a supervisor should maintain notes on actual instances that describe job performance (Please see Appendix B, Figure 12).

The use of multiple evaluators was discussed in the literature review as a means to obtain a clearer, more objective view of performance. However, the literature review also suggested peer evaluation may be guided by social comparison processes rather than actual job performance. For this reason, the acceptance of peer evaluation among employees tends to be low.

The survey of Fresno Firefighters sought to determine whether the use of multiple evaluators was valued. Respondents were asked whether they would expect other supervisors to provide input concerning the appraisal of their performance. According to the survey, significant support for this concept was indicated. Approximately 71 percent

of the respondents indicated that other supervisors should provide input regarding the

performance observed in an employee performance appraisal program. Only nine

respondents indicated this concept should not be used (Please see Appendix B, Figure

13).

In addition, the survey asked whether non-supervisory employees should provide

input concerning the appraisal of performance. The results support the literature review.

Less than one-third of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the concept of non-

supervisory employees providing input on performance appraisals (Please see Appendix

B, Figure 14).

The literature review identified the advantages of supervisors receiving

constructive criticism from subordinates. Such feedback can lead to the identification of

areas where the supervisor needs to improve. In addition, communication is often

enhanced, while misperceptions are reduced. The survey supported this argument. When

asked whether firefighters of Fresno would value providing constructive feedback to

supervisors, an overwhelming majority answered in the affirmative. This included 67

percent who agreed or strongly agreed constructive feedback should be provided to

supervisors. Only 8 respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this concept (Please

see Appendix B, Figure 15).

Sharing expectations with employees was a common element identified in

multiple sources of literature. In fact, the establishment of what is expected of the

employee was seen as a first step to the performance appraisal process. This practice was

supported in the firefighter survey. When asked whether the receipt of expectations from

captains regarding performance would be valued, 68 percent either agreed or strongly

agreed. Only eleven respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed that expectations would

be a valued element of an employee performance appraisal program (Please see

Appendix, B, Figure 16).

According to the literature review, continual feedback and coaching on

performance should be an integral process of the employee evaluation system. In fact,

some organizations are scrapping traditional employee performance appraisal programs

and emphasizing leadership skills in supervisors and encouraging supervisors to provide

continual feedback and coaching to subordinates. The results of the firefighter survey

were consistent with the literature reviewed. Sixty-three percent indicated they agreed or

strongly agreed continual feedback and coaching were valued as significant elements of a

performance appraisal program. Twelve of the 73 respondents indicated they did not

value feedback and coaching from captains of the department (Please see Appendix B,

Figure 17).

Research Question 3. How would the implementation of an annual employee

performance appraisal program benefit the newly hired, "Generation X" employees of the

Fresno Fire Department?

The literature review discussed the cultural differences of the generation of

employees born between 1964 and 1983. Known as "Generation X," this generation of

employees is perceived to be less driven, lacking in basic skills, and less than loyal to the

company. One author suggested employers should consider the use of the employee

performance appraisal process like never before in order to obtain optimum performance

from Generation X employees.

According to the literature review, Generation X employees respond well to continual feedback, marketable skills development, mentoring, the use of performance contracts, and communication of where the employee fits into the organization.

Questions 17 through 21 of the Fresno Firefighter survey asked whether such benefits would be realized through an employee performance appraisal program (Specific data regarding how Fresno Firefighters valued the benefits of an employee performance appraisal program may be found in Appendix B, Figures 17 through 21).

Continual feedback and coaching were recognized as beneficial components in the literature review. This was especially true of Generation X employees. Multiple sources indicated Generation X employees benefit from feedback as a continual process. The Fresno Firefighter survey supported this argument. Responses of the firefighter survey were divided between Generation X employees and those representing the "Baby Boomers" of the organization (Please see Appendix B, Figure 1). While the combined results indicated most firefighters valued continual feedback and coaching it was even more evident within the Generation X workforce. Sixty-nine percent of the respondents from the Generation X group indicated they would benefit from such feedback and coaching (Please see Appendix B, Figure 17).

Significant argument was presented on the value Generation X employees place on marketable skills development. According to the literature review, Generation X employees see their own marketable skills as their only source of security in today's job market. Therefore, these employees are interested in ways to develop professional job skills.

Question 18 asked respondents whether they would value the employee performance appraisal process as a means to develop the skills needed in the firefighting profession. While the Baby Boomers provided mixed results, the Generation X employees answered much more strongly that such a system would be valued as a process to develop the necessary job skills in the firefighting profession. Fifty-nine percent of the Generation X respondents indicated this was a valuable benefit while less than 20 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed (Please see Appendix B, Figure 18).

The literature review argued that members of the Generation X workforce welcomed the opportunity to develop long-term bonds with teachers and mentors. Supervisors were encouraged to spend time with members of this generation to confirm what they are doing now will make a difference in their overall development. Question 19 of the Fresno Firefighter survey asked respondents if they would value the opportunity to discuss career goals with their supervisors through a performance appraisal program. While the Baby Boomer employees indicated mixed value in this, Generation X employees indicated fairly strongly such a process would be valued. Of the 59 who responded, 33 indicated they would value this opportunity (Please see Appendix B, Figure 19).

According to the literature review, skills training should describe the parameters that define quality service. Such parameters become the standards of the organization. Employee performance appraisals should include these standards. The literature review suggested Generation X employees react well to such appraisals as forms of written contracts of what is expected by the organization. However, when asked whether Generation X firefighters in Fresno would value a performance appraisal as a form of

contract of what is expected mixed results were obtained. Approximately 34 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed (Please see Appendix B, Figure 20).

The literature review described organizational socialization as a process by which an employee acquires the appropriate knowledge and skills to perform an organizational role. This occurs in three steps. First, the processes of role clarity, expectations, reward, and punishment are established. Second, employees become aware of organizational norms, establish interpersonal relationships, and gain feelings of importance to the organization. The final phase involves mutual acceptance and an internalization of organizational values. The literature review argued that in order to foster long-term commitment to the organization, Generation X employees must understand where they fit into the career ladder of the organization.

The author considered an employee performance appraisal program as a means to communicate how employees fit into the Fresno Fire Department and what prospects exist for future growth. However, the results of the survey provided mixed responses from Generation X employees. Approximately 42 percent of the respondents indicated they either agreed or strongly agreed. Approximately 34 percent indicated they somewhat agreed, while 22 percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed (Please see Appendix B, Figure 21).

DISCUSSION

Creating cultural change in an organization is a difficult task. This is especially true when the organization has been in existence for over 125 years. Policies and procedures tend to become stagnant. Employees become comfortable with the way

things are done, even if more efficient alternatives have been identified. Such has been the case of the Fresno Fire Department.

The department wished to implement an annual employee performance appraisal program. The administration of the department had determined such a process would be beneficial. However, in order to carry out this change, the author felt a common vision must be established among the stakeholders.

A major stake holder in the process was the firefighter rank within the department. After all, these individuals would receive this new form of communication. A sense of participation and trust needed to be developed before a performance appraisal program could be initiated. The purpose of this research project was to determine the value Fresno Firefighters placed on the employee performance appraisal process. In doing so, the barriers to implementing this change might be identified as well as the components members believed should be included. In addition, the author sought ways this program might prove beneficial to new employees for future growth.

The literature review identified significant barriers the workplace encounters when attempting to implement employee appraisal. Krug (1998) explained that most often, managers lack the training to give feedback and provide little coaching. In addition, employees often do not support the process, laying the entire burden of appraisal on the shoulders of the supervisor. Graham (2004) suggests many supervisors lack the spine to honestly evaluate subordinates. Stein (1999) described a resistance to procedural change seen in managers as well as subordinates.

The author sought input from firefighters in Fresno as to whether they would support the appraisal process. The majority of those polled indicated they would support

an annual performance appraisal program. This issue was significant since the workforce

in Fresno had changed to one that was relatively young with few years of experience. It

appears a timely opportunity exists to affect this change.

The perceptions of the firefighters regarding their captains' support of this

program and their abilities to carry out this process were sought. The survey concluded

captains in Fresno may not support this program as Stein suggests. This may be due to

the unknown implications to this procedural change, or simply the fact that many

supervisors do not feel comfortable evaluating performance. While the firefighters felt

captains of the department possessed the ability to document, evaluate, and provide

feedback, it appears the department will need to spend time reviewing the benefits of this

change with captains through training. In addition, the process should be designed for

easy administration.

Krug and Stein discussed the evaluation instrument. While Krug cautioned

readers to avoid cumbersome processes, Stein described many performance appraisal

instruments to be far too general and do not apply to the fire service. A task force within

the department reviewed the performance appraisal instrument used for all city of Fresno

employees and determined the instrument was too general and encouraged raters to

provide mid-ranged scores. The firefighter survey confirmed this instrument should not

be used. An evaluative tool designed specifically for the Fresno Fire Department should

be developed.

Feedback provided to the employee can have a positive and negative effect. Lam

and Yik (2002) explained feedback can be of extreme importance to the employee.

However, when feedback is negative in nature, the morale of the employee is often

reduced. Lam and Yik found this to be true in one-third of the cases. McManus (2001) argued that negative feedback may elicit a fear response in the employee. Such a response might lead employees to concentrate solely on accomplishing the minimum tasks required in order to maintain employment. Such a response would prove disastrous in an emergency service industry that relies heavily on motivated, creative problem solvers to get the job done 365 days a year.

The responses from firefighters were not the same as those experienced by Lam and Yik. It appears most firefighters in Fresno are open to all feedback. However, because almost 25 percent agreed negative feedback can reduce morale, attention to this issue must be given. This should be addressed by providing supervisors with training on the proper way to communicate poor performance to employees. By doing this the department might very well obtain optimum performance while maintaining a motivated workforce.

The lack of support provided by the administration of the department was seen as a potential barrier. Graham (2004) explained the importance of commitment of the organization to conduct performance evaluations properly. Byornlund (1997) suggested organizations must provide logistical support that includes in-depth job descriptions, training for supervisors, and ongoing updates. Employees often become apathetic toward systems of our workplace if the administration of the organization does not provide continual support of the program. If the administration fails to support new programs on multiple occasions, the prospects of gaining employee support for future new programs are reduced.

The firefighter survey provided mixed results as to whether they felt the administration would provide the needed support and training to maintain an employee appraisal program. This should be a clear message to the management of the department that such a process should not be taken lightly. Continual review and training should be a part of this program if it is to be a success.

Byornlund (1997) identified labor unions as potential barriers to performance appraisal. According to Byornlund, labor unions typically emphasize seniority as a basis for promotion and salary decisions. In addition, unions often distrust management's ability to make unbiased performance ratings. The results of the firefighter survey confirmed these findings. Common vision and trust must be established between the administration of the department and the executive board of the firefighters' union. The Fresno Firefighter's Union is an influential force in Fresno. Only through participation in the development of this process will the union ever support this process.

The recommended components of an employee appraisal program were reviewed. Goodson and Sneed (1998) provided an overview of performance evaluation reports. Such reports are based on observation of performance against industry standards. Stein (1999) and Graham (2004) discussed the importance of developing job descriptions and measuring performance against standards of performance. Fandray (2001) suggests going a step farther by defining the quality of performance against performance standards.

The firefighter survey confirmed these recommendations. Overall, firefighters need to know what is required and how well standards should be performed. By providing this information up front, expectations of the organization are communicated.

In addition, by defining the behaviors considered standard, above standard, and below standard a more objective rating system may be established for Fresno. This component may very well lead to a less cumbersome process that will make employee appraisal easier for captains of the department.

Stein and Graham emphasized the use of supervisor's notes to document performance. When considering the prospects of a supervisor maintaining notes on a subordinate's work performance, images of a "Secret little black book" sometimes emerge. This may be due to cultural issues regarding supervisor, subordinate relations. Firefighters generally supported this concept according to the Fresno survey. The fact is by maintaining a supervisor's log Fresno Captains will be able to retrieve information regarding performance over the entire rating period. In the absence of such information, captains may rely on basic size up of employees or the most recent period of performance just prior to the actual evaluation. Such a practice will provide little information to the employee and is of little benefit to the organization.

The use of multiple information sources for employee evaluation was considered. This included the use of multiple supervisors as well as peer evaluation. Stubblebine (2001) suggested the practice of peer evaluation was becoming increasingly popular. However, employee acceptance of peer evaluation is generally low.

The Fresno Firefighter survey supported the use of multiple supervisors in providing input concerning appraisal of job performance. This is probably due to the nature of work assignments in Fresno. On any given work shift an employee may be assigned to one of twenty-one fire companies. This is due to various staffing needs of the department including the need to temporarily assign employees to work out of grade as

well as provide qualified workers for specialty assignments including hazardous materials response and technical rescue. Therefore, many firefighters work multiple shifts without seeing their regularly assigned officer. A performance evaluation system that allows for the input of multiple supervisors would best serve the department.

On the other hand, the firefighter survey was consistent with Stubblebine's findings regarding peer evaluation, as the survey provided mixed support. This may be due to the fear that rumors and reputations would be used in evaluating performance instead of actual performance. The practice of using peer evaluation should be avoided in the system established by the fire department. Evaluation should be completed by supervisors. The employees who are being evaluated agree.

This is not to say employees should not provide feedback. Communication that provides 360 degree feedback to the supervisor was discussed in the literature review (Stein, 1999). The firefighter survey provided positive support for this process. This would prove advantageous for the captains of the department. While receiving this form of criticism may be difficult, such a practice would at least improve communication between captains and firefighters and may very well reduce misperceptions on the job.

The survey indicated firefighters would value receiving expectations as well as feedback and coaching through a performance appraisal program. Such elements were continual themes in various literature reviewed. Wiant (1999) explained today's employees find themselves in situations where they must change direction frequently. The American fire service is an ever-changing industry that strives to meet the needs of its diverse communities. Such is the case in Fresno where a new fire chief has set out to create change. In addition, the community continually scrutinizes budget allocations to

assure a good value for taxes is achieved. New forms of service will likely be created by

the department. This will require new work processes to be implemented. Therefore,

continual communication of what is expected as well as feedback and coaching on the

work processes that are accomplished would be valuable to these employees.

As the services and work processes change within the Fresno Fire Department, so

too is its workforce. Individuals who are part of the "Baby-Boomer" generation have

been retiring at a steady rate. Since 1999, the department has hired 90 new firefighters.

This accounts for over one-third of all employees within the department. This new

workforce comes with new work attitudes and different needs than the generation before

them.

Audibert and Jones (2002) studied generations of workers and the development of

these individuals that determined their work attitudes. The generation of employees born

between 1964 and 1983 has been identified as "Generation X." These individuals have

been characterized as being less driven and less loyal to the company (Maynard, 1996).

On the other hand, employees of this generation appear to take charge of their own

destiny and seek ways to develop themselves. Caudron (1997) explained that companies

should focus heavily on training as well as feedback in order to obtain optimum

performance from these employees.

The author suggests Generation X employees would benefit from an appraisal

process that focuses on professional development. Minerd (1999) argues Generation X

employees attain a sense of security through the development of skills and the value they

add to the company. Adams (2000) agreed. Since employees of Generation X tend to

see themselves as free agents, they may very well value a process that improves their

marketability. The results of the firefighter survey confirm these arguments. Fresno Firefighters clearly indicated they would benefit from a system that provides feedback, coaching, and skills development. By establishing a formal program that provides these benefits, it is quite possible the employee will view the performance appraisal process as a career development process as well. This would have very positive implications for a fire department that is struggling to develop this recent influx of employees.

The job tasks of a firefighter are complex. A profession that once sought workers from various skilled trades such as carpentry, plumbing, and auto mechanics is now pursuing college educated workers. In this case, subjects such as emergency medicine, hazardous materials management, fire behavior, and incident management are emphasized. While development of the fire service profession is important, it appears workers of this generation often lack the basic mechanical aptitude and knowledge of building construction that we took for granted with generations previously (Martin, 2000). The employee performance appraisal process could be used to assure these vital skills are not forgotten.

Martin also suggested Generation X employees are familiar with written contracts and react well to them. While this may be the case, Fresno Firefighters did not necessarily believe this to be a benefit of the establishment of an employee appraisal program. The author was interested to know if employees would recognize this component as a clearer indicator of what was expected. The firefighters did indicate the establishment of expectations as a valued component in a previous question. It could be that such a process must be in place before workers will consider it as a true benefit.

This may be the case for the final question as well. Smith (2000) described the importance of organizational socialization. The fire service tends to follow the first phase of socialization Smith describes by introducing the employee to what is expected in a recruit academy. In this instance, role clarity, expectations, reward, and punishment occur. Upon successful graduation from the academy, the second phase begins as firefighters are typically assigned to a fire company under the direction of a fire captain. Through this experience, organizational norms are followed, relationships are made, and feelings of importance begin to develop as the employee becomes accepted as a team member.

However, it appears the final phase of socialization is currently overlooked in Fresno. Smith argues that Generation X employees may never develop a long term commitment to an organization unless the employee understands where they fit into the career ladder of the organization. Rather than assuming such communication is taking place informally, the Fresno Fire Department should establish a formal system that better informs the employee. It could be that actual prospects for future growth will be identified and the firefighter will see this as a beneficial process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The literature review and firefighter survey provided sufficient information to suggest an annual employee performance appraisal program should be established in Fresno. The following objectives are recommended in order to obtain maximum benefit for the employees involved in this system.

1. The Fresno Fire Department should establish a written policy that outlines the guidelines to be used for an annual performance appraisal of all firefighters.

2. The general framework of the performance appraisal program should identify firefighters as major stakeholders in the evaluation process. In doing so, a component that addresses a plan for development should be implemented.

3. The appraisal should be specific to the firefighting profession. The rating instrument should be job task specific for the Fresno Fire Department.

4. Continual training should be provided to captains of the department to assure these supervisors understand the objectives of this program. This training should include information on how to effectively provide feedback and coaching as well as techniques used to properly document performance.

5. The administration of the department should assure logistical support including training is provided. Periodic review of the program should occur to ensure information is up to date.

6. Job specifications including standards of performance should be identified within the policy. In order to reduce subjectivity, examples of behaviors that identify levels of performance should be included.

7. A system which allows for input from multiple supervisors should be established. Such a system should allow for computerized access so that participation from additional supervisors may be easily obtained. Examination of the systems used to allow for multiple raters in fire service performance appraisals should be considered by future readers of research.

8. An element that allows for constructive feedback from the subordinate to the fire officer should be established. Employees should be encouraged to provide such feedback so managers may provide the leadership that is expected by the organization.

9. The participation of the firefighters' union should be sought and welcomed in the development of this process. Only through the development of common vision and trust of labor and management will this program ever attain maximum benefit.

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APPENDIX A

Survey of Fresno Firefighters

April 26, 2003

TO: FIREFIGHTER

THRU: ASSIGNED STATION CAPTAIN

FROM: RICHARD L. CABRAL, BATTALION CHIEF

SUBJECT: SURVEY ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS

As you may be aware, I am a fourth-year student in the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. A partial requirement for this four-year program includes the completion of an applied-research paper each year. This year I am researching employee performance appraisal programs. As part of this study, I hope to gain your input as to what components you might value of an employee performance appraisal program. Completion of this particular research project will meet the requirements of the Executive Leadership course I recently completed.

I would greatly appreciate if you would complete the attached survey by circling the most correct answers. Please answer each question honestly as your honest opinions regarding employee performance appraisals are highly valued. **Once completed, be sure to fill in your name and return the survey to me directly using the intra-office mail system.** Your name will solely be used for tracking purposes. The information you provide will assist me tremendously with my research.

Thank you very much for your time and cooperation.

Executive Fire Officer Program
Survey/Questionnaire

Name:_____

Please circle the best answer that applies.

1.   I was born:

    Prior to 1964   Between 1964 to 1983   After 1983

2.   I would support an annual appraisal of my work performance.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

3.   The standard city of Fresno form used for employee evaluations should be used to appraise performance of Fresno Fire Department employees.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

4.   Captains of the Fresno Fire Department would support an annual performance appraisal program.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

5.   Captains of the Fresno Fire Department have sufficient ability to accurately document and evaluate my performance.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

6.   Captains of the Fresno Fire Department have sufficient ability to provide the feedback and coaching I need to successfully perform my job.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

7.   Negative feedback I may receive through the appraisal of my performance would reduce my morale on the job.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

8. The administration of this fire department would provide sufficient support and training in order to maintain a successful performance appraisal program.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

9. The firefighter's union would support the implementation of an annual performance appraisal program.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

10. An annual performance appraisal program should identify the <u>performance</u> standards that are valued by the fire department.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

11. An annual performance appraisal program should be as objective as possible by identifying the <u>behaviors</u> which are standard, above standard, and below standard.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

12. In order to conduct an objective appraisal, I would expect my supervisor to keep notes or a log of actual instances that describe my job performance.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

13. In order to conduct an objective appraisal, I would expect <u>other supervisors</u> who have observed me to provide input concerning my job performance to my rating officer.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

14. In order to conduct an objective appraisal, I would expect other <u>non-supervisory employees</u> who have observed me to provide input concerning my job performance to my rating officer.

    Strongly   Disagree   Somewhat   Agree   Strongly
    Disagree   Agree   Agree

15.   I would value the opportunity to provide constructive feedback to my
        supervisors in order that they may better supervise me.

        | Strongly | Disagree | Somewhat | Agree | Strongly |
        | Disagree | | Agree | | Agree |

16.   I would value receiving expectations from my captain regarding my
        performance through an annual performance appraisal program.

        | Strongly | Disagree | Somewhat | Agree | Strongly |
        | Disagree | | Agree | | Agree |

17.   I would value receiving continual feedback and coaching from my captain
        regarding my performance through an annual performance appraisal program.

        | Strongly | Disagree | Somewhat | Agree | Strongly |
        | Disagree | | Agree | | Agree |

18.   I would value an annual performance appraisal program as a process to assure
        I develop the skills that are needed in this profession.

        | Strongly | Disagree | Somewhat | Agree | Strongly |
        | Disagree | | Agree | | Agree |

19.   I would value the opportunity to discuss my career goals through a
        performance appraisal program.

        | Strongly | Disagree | Somewhat | Agree | Strongly |
        | Disagree | | Agree | | Agree |

20.   I would value the completed performance appraisal as a form of contract of
        what is expected of my performance.

        | Strongly | Disagree | Somewhat | Agree | Strongly |
        | Disagree | | Agree | | Agree |

21.   An annual performance appraisal program would provide better
        communication to me as to how I fit into this organization and what my
        prospects are for future growth.

        | Strongly | Disagree | Somewhat | Agree | Strongly |
        | Disagree | | Agree | | Agree |

APPENDIX B

Graphical Analysis of Fresno Firefighter Survey
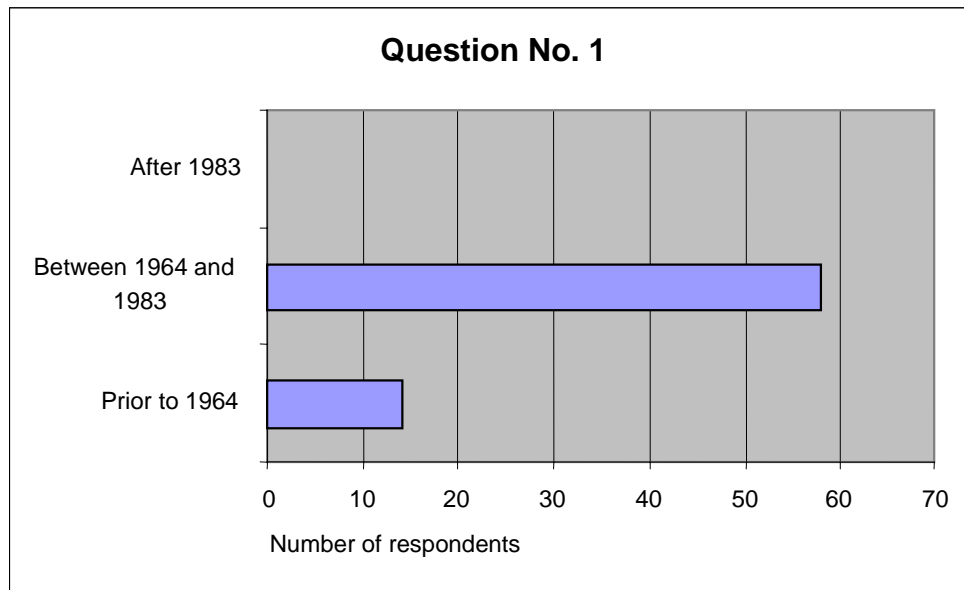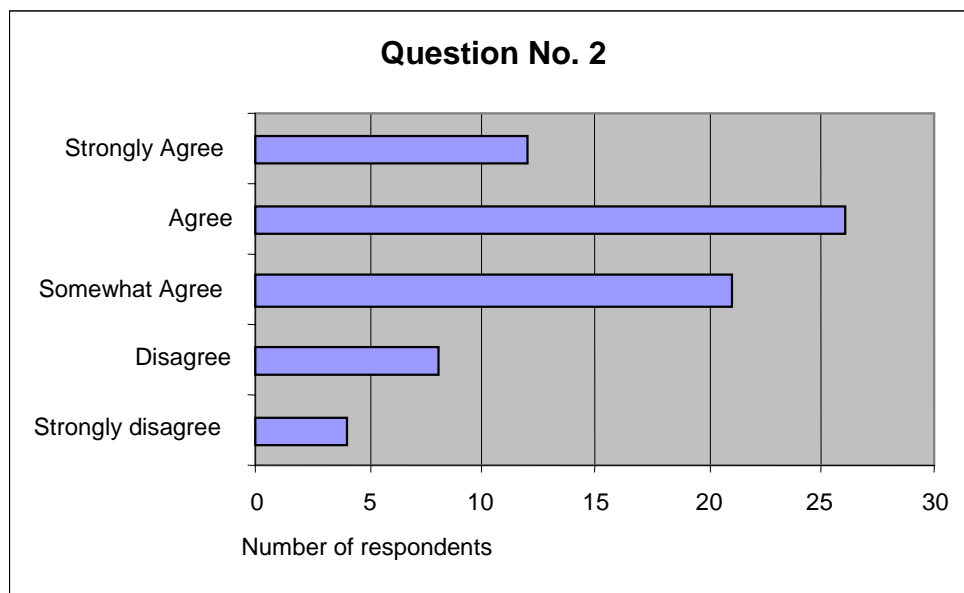
Figure No. 1. I was born:

Question No. 1

Figure No. 2. I would support an annual appraisal of my work performance.

Question No. 2

Figure No. 3. The standard city of Fresno form used for evaluations should be used to appraise performance of Fresno Fire Department employees.
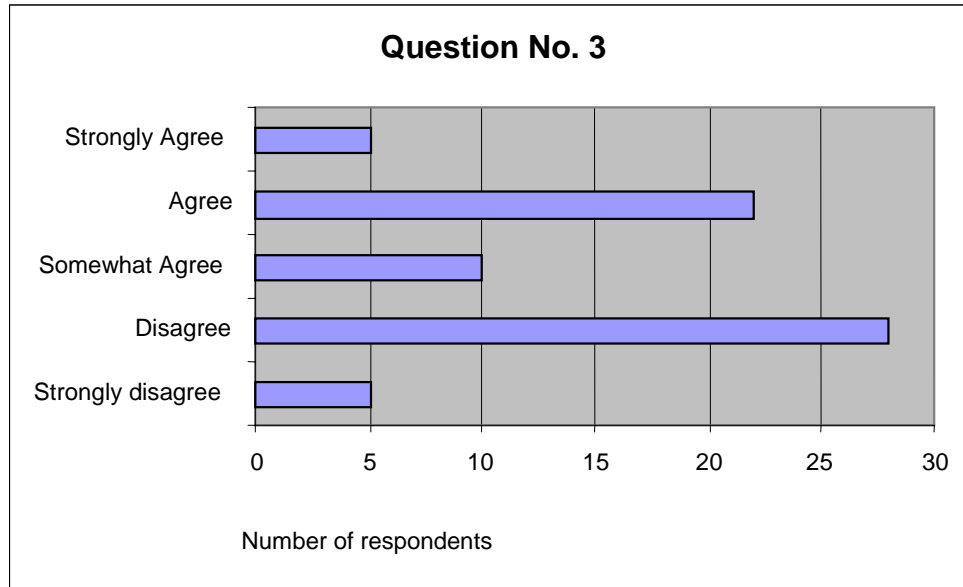

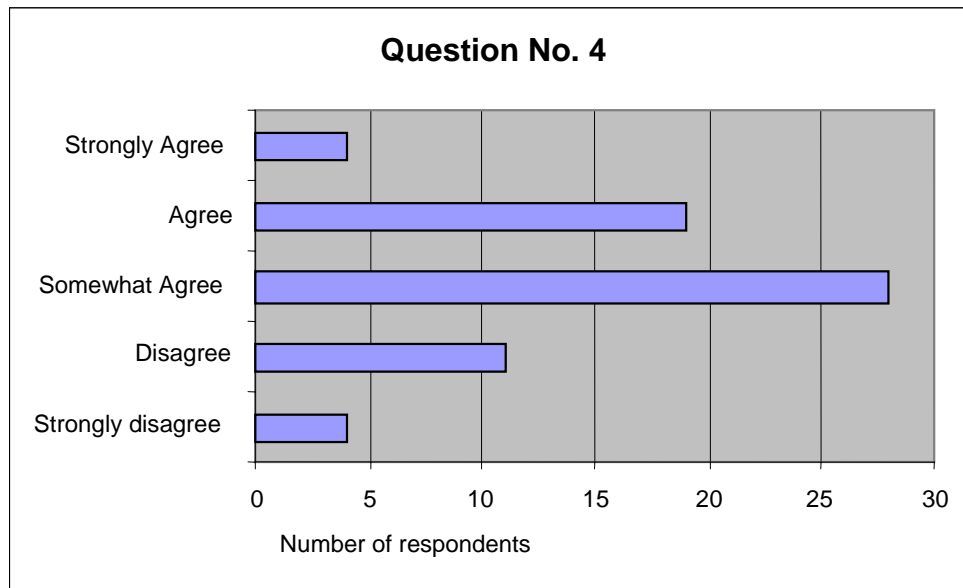Figure No. 4. Captains of the Fresno Fire Department would support an annual performance appraisal program.

Figure No. 5. Captains of the Fresno Fire Department have sufficient ability to
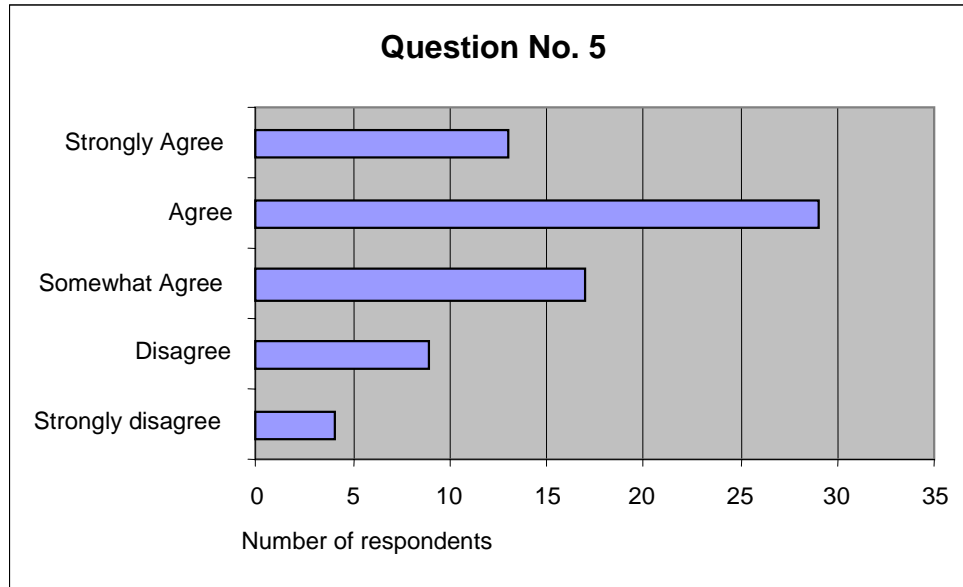document and evaluate performance of employees.

Question No. 5

Bar chart showing number of respondents:
- Strongly Agree: ~13
- Agree: ~29
- Somewhat Agree: ~17
- Disagree: ~9
- Strongly disagree: ~4

Number of respondents (axis 0 to 35)

Figure No. 6. Captains of the Fresno Fire Department have sufficient ability to provide
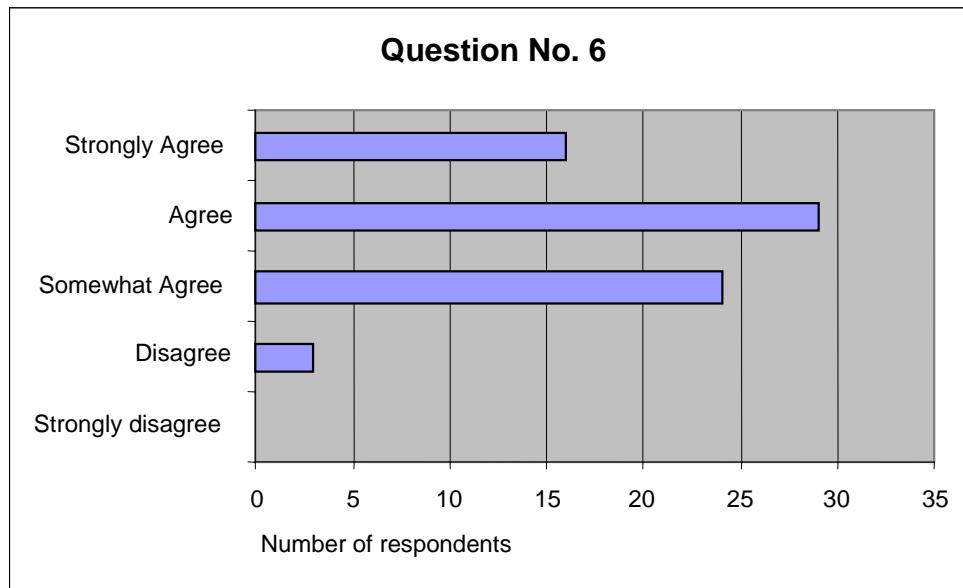feedback and coaching.

Question No. 6

Bar chart showing number of respondents:
- Strongly Agree: ~16
- Agree: ~29
- Somewhat Agree: ~24
- Disagree: ~3
- Strongly disagree: 0

Number of respondents (axis 0 to 35)

Figure No. 7. Negative feedback of my performance would reduce my morale on the

job.

Question No. 7

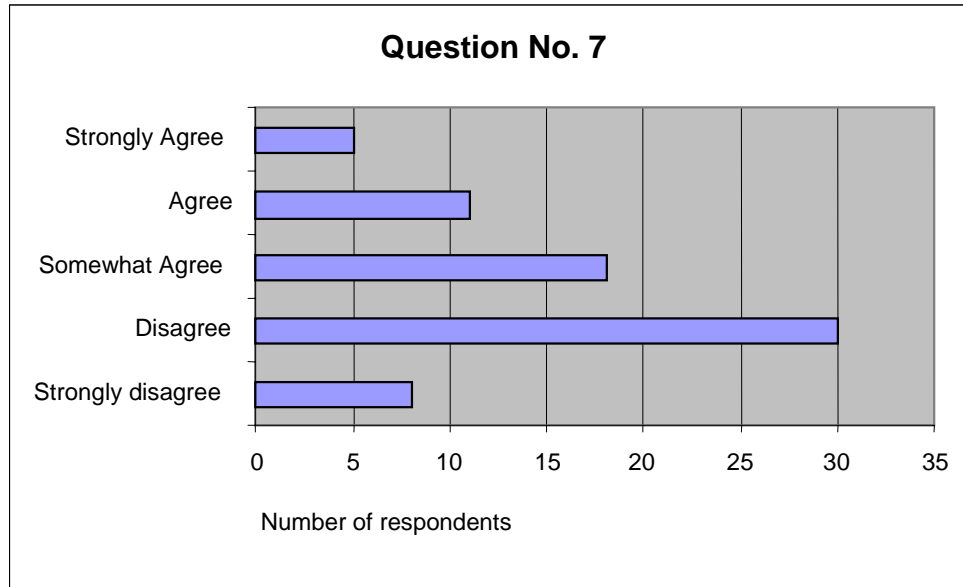|	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Somewhat Agree	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

Number of respondents

Figure No. 8. The administration of the Fresno Fire Department would provide support

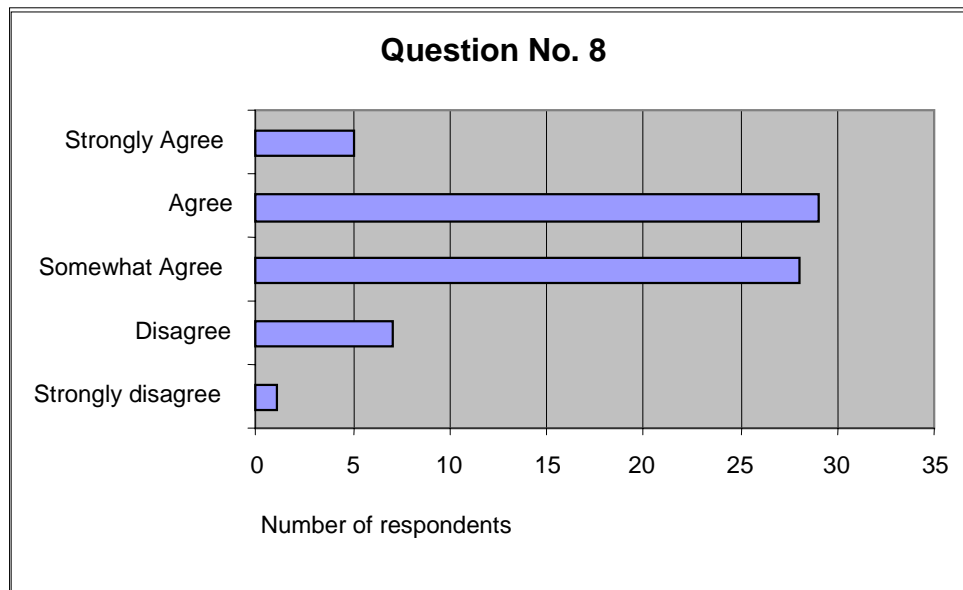and training for an employee performance evaluation program.

Question No. 8

Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Somewhat Agree	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

Number of respondents

Figure No. 9. The firefighters union would support an annual performance appraisal

program.

Question No. 9

Strongly Agree
Agree
Somewhat Agree
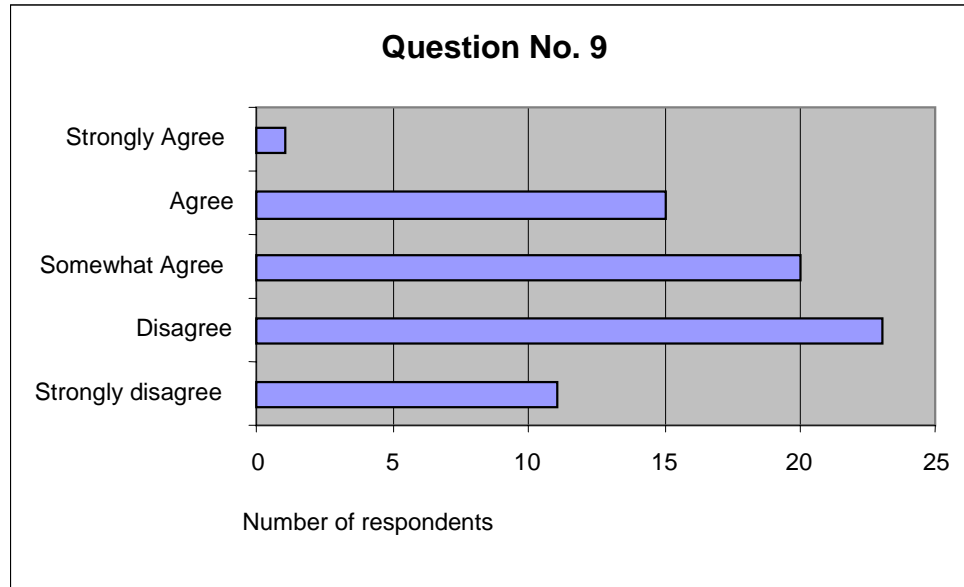Disagree
Strongly disagree

Number of respondents

Figure No. 10.   A performance appraisal program should identify the performance

standards that are valued by the fire department.

Question No. 10
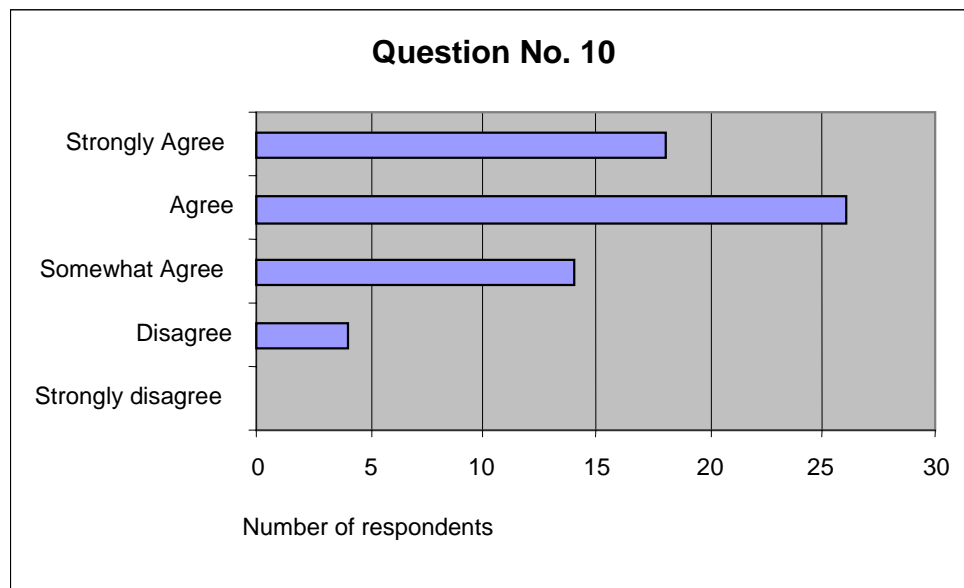
Strongly Agree
Agree
Somewhat Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

Number of respondents

Figure No. 11.   A performance appraisal program should identify the behaviors
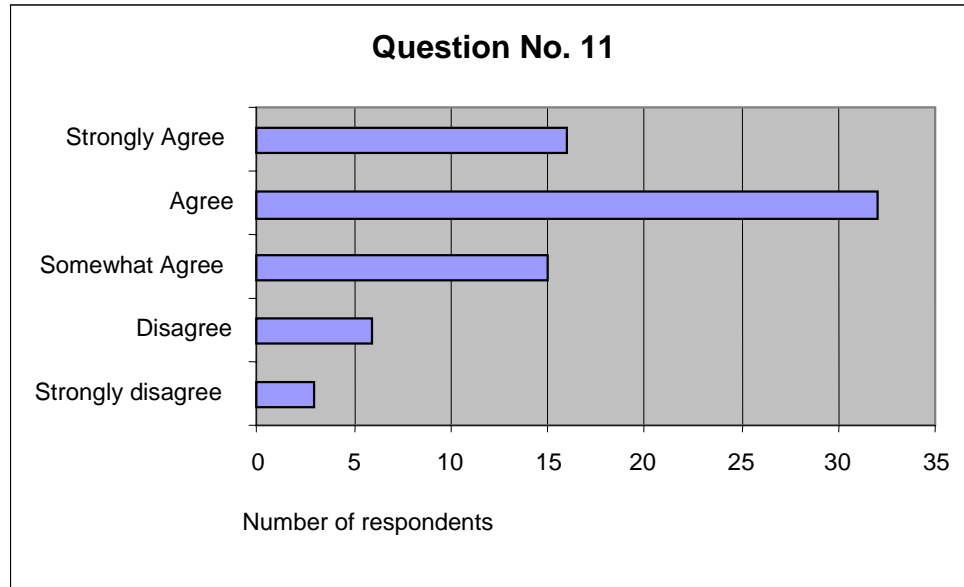
that are standard, above standard, and below standard.

Question No. 11

Figure No. 12.   I would expect my supervisor to keep notes of actual instances that
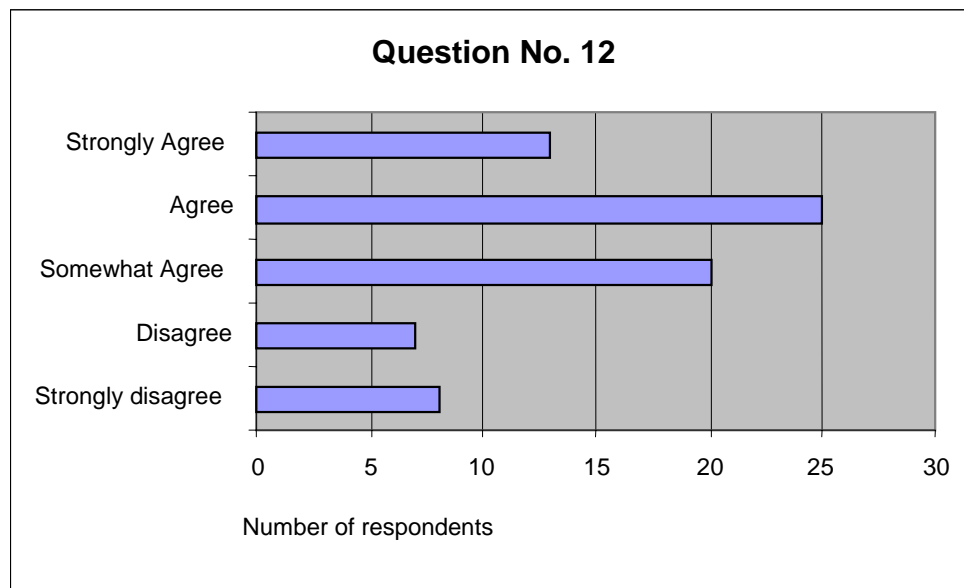
describe my job performance.

Question No. 12

Figure No. 13.   I would expect other supervisors to provide input concerning the

appraisal of my performance.

Question No. 13

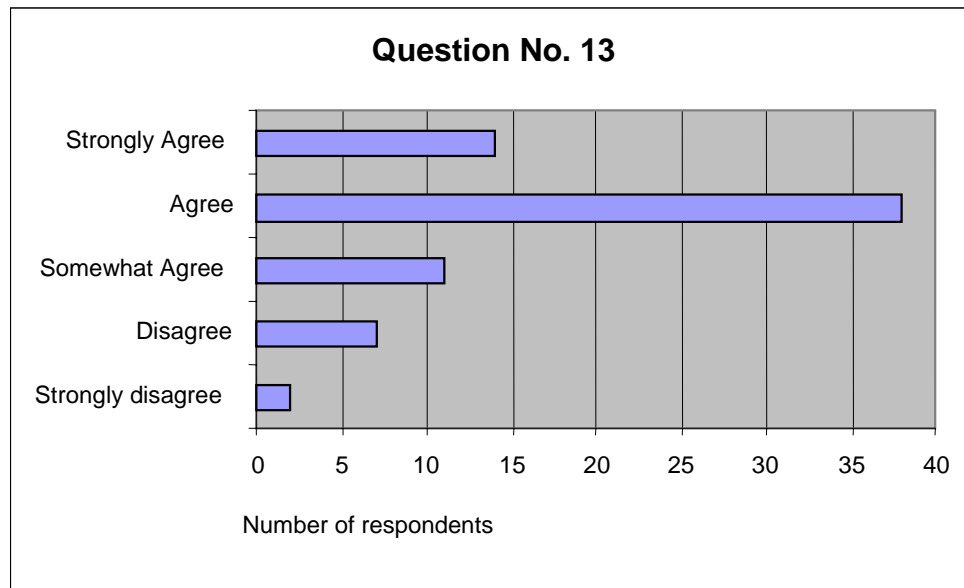| Response	Number of respondents
Strongly Agree	14
Agree	38
Somewhat Agree	11
Disagree	7
Strongly disagree	2

Number of respondents

Figure No. 14.   I would expect other non-supervisory employees to provide input

concerning the appraisal of my performance.

Question No. 14

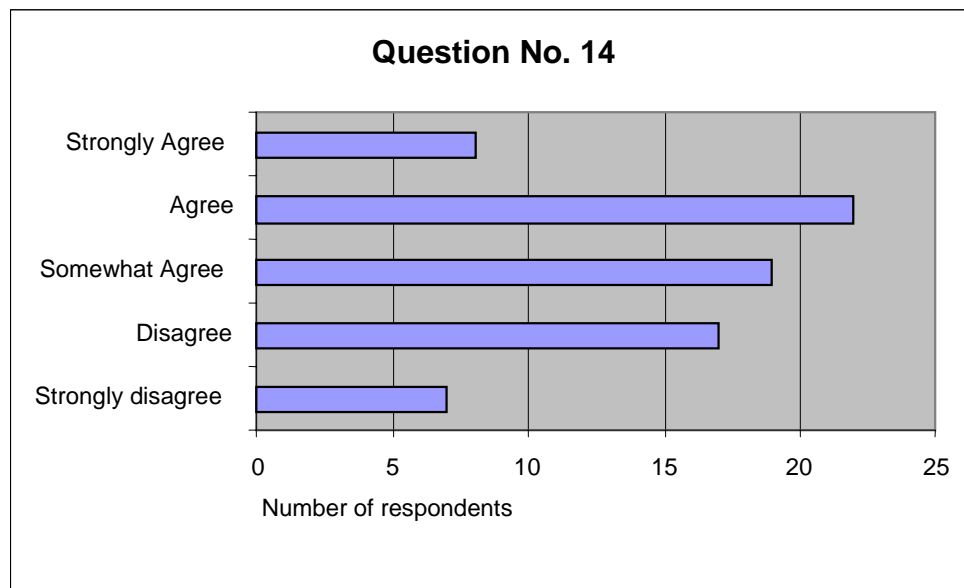| Response	Number of respondents
Strongly Agree	8
Agree	22
Somewhat Agree	19
Disagree	17
Strongly disagree	7

Number of respondents

Figure No. 15.   I would value the opportunity to provide constructive feedback to my supervisors in order that they may better supervise me.
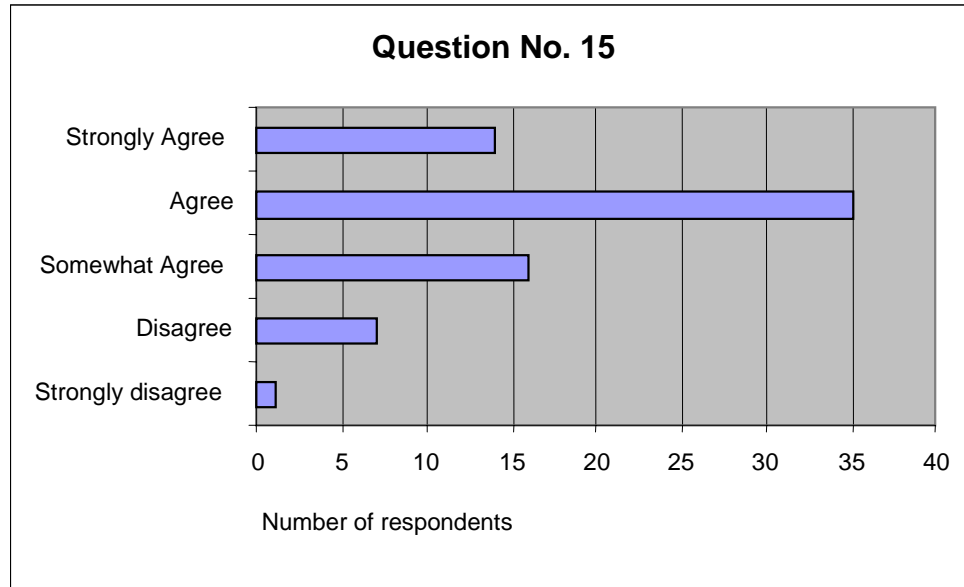
Question No. 15

Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Somewhat Agree	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

Number of respondents

Figure No. 16.   I would value receiving expectations from my captain regarding my performance through a performance appraisal program.

Question No. 16

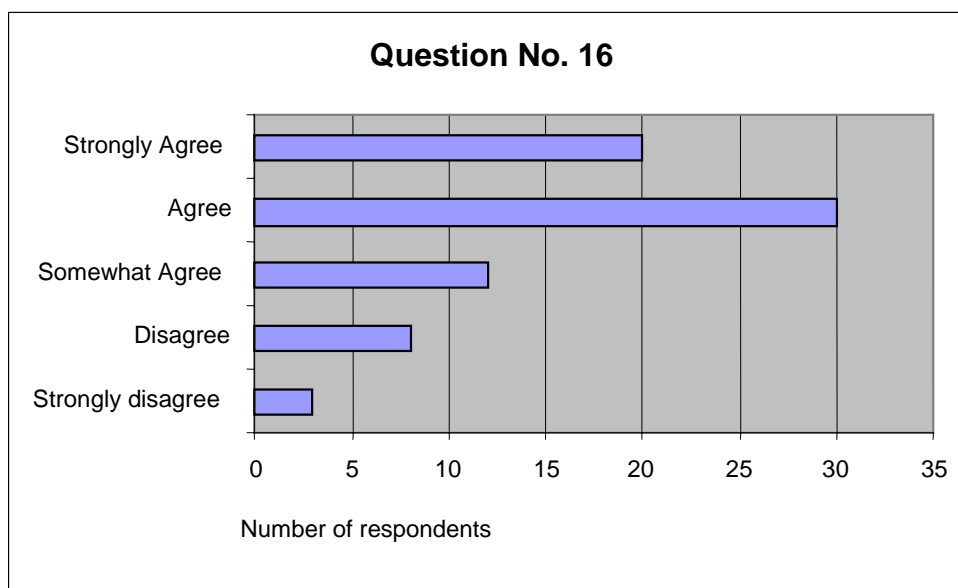|	
Strongly Agree	
Agree	
Somewhat Agree	
Disagree	
Strongly disagree	

Number of respondents

Figure No. 17.   I would value receiving continual feedback and coaching from my

captain through a performance appraisal program.
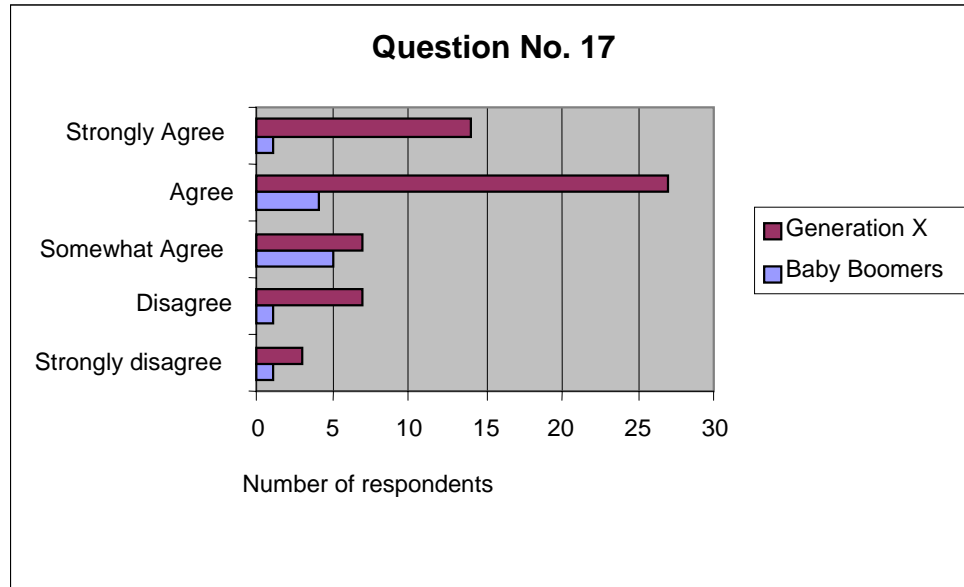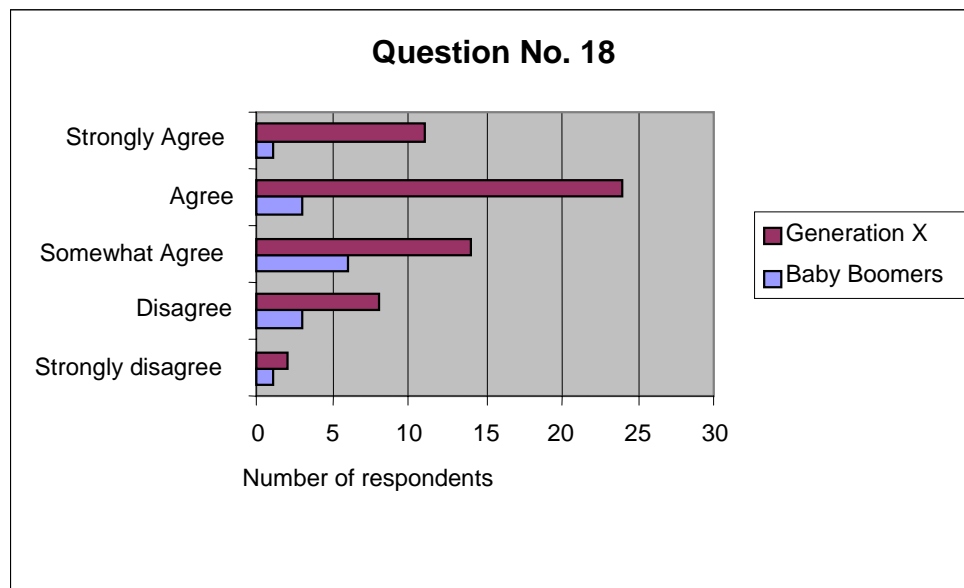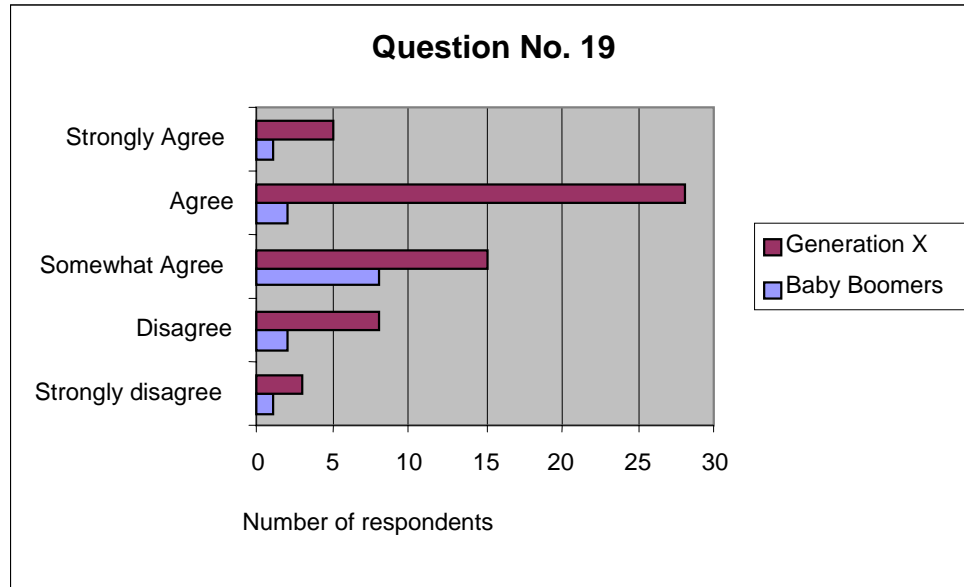
Question No. 17

Figure No. 18.   I would value a performance appraisal program as a process to

assure I develop the skills I need in this profession.

Question No. 18

Figure No. 19.   I would value the opportunity to discuss my career goals through a

performance appraisal program.

Question No. 19

	Generation X	Baby Boomers
Strongly Agree		
Agree		
Somewhat Agree		
Disagree		
Strongly disagree		

Number of respondents

Figure No. 20.   I would value the performance appraisal as a form of contract of

what is expected of my performance.

Question No. 20

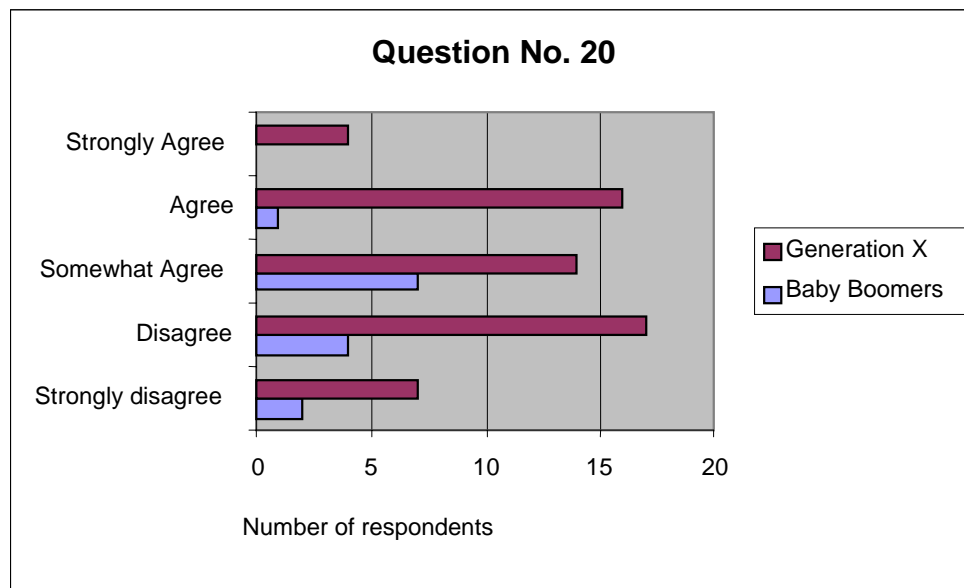|	Generation X	Baby Boomers
Strongly Agree		
Agree		
Somewhat Agree		
Disagree		
Strongly disagree		

Number of respondents

Figure No. 21.   A performance appraisal program would provide better

communication as to how I fit into this organization and what my future prospects are for

future growth.